Combination Chapters

*MI Ch. 5&6/UbD Ch. 6&7*

All four chapters discuss ways to adapt teaching styles to suit the very diverse needs of students and to integrate Multiple Intelligence theory and differentiated instruction into the classroom. They give an optimistic picture of how multiple intelligences are being incorporated into modern classrooms, saying that much of the strategies we can use to embrace multiple intelligences in the classroom are already being done by good teachers. Good teachers know how to organically adapt their methods to suit the needs of their students and how to go beyond lectures and quantitative tests. Multiple Intelligence theory talks about taking this further and translating the same material into practical, hands-on methods that allow for engaged and meaningful learning for all students regardless of what their learning style might be. MI theory and differentiated instruction are about communication between the student and the teacher, as well as between the student and the classroom content. When one method of communication does not adequately reach the student, another method must be used to ensure that all students understand the fundamentals and essential questions of the curriculum. The books specify that MI theory and differentiated instruction are about substituting ineffective methods for more beneficial ones, instead of adding on unnecessary pedagogy that does not have practical purposes. As a whole, MI theory and differentiated instruction are about teachers being flexible with their methods and being open to adapting their instruction to allow students with many different learning styles the opportunity to learn from the same curriculum.

The information in these four chapters is all very relevant to my future as a teacher. I think one of my biggest challenges as a teacher will be adapting my instruction to suit the needs of all my students, because I have a tendency to stick with methods that are comfortable to me. I also get frustrated when those methods don’t work, and blame myself and think that I failed. But because I have a natural inclination towards orderly, linear lessons that are based in language and writing skills, I will need to work hard to make things that are just the opposite sometimes. English in particular is a subject that is easy to use the same static methods for, but that is even more reason for teachers to come up with new ways of teaching it. I like what the MI book had to say about teachers inherently doing a lot of the adapting necessary to make that theory work. That makes me feel like I really do have what it takes to be an effective teacher for different learning styles, and I think that kind of optimism is exactly what the education system needs. One of the books said that, in order for MI theory and differentiated instruction to work, teachers have to see themselves as capable of adapting and modifying their lessons, and having confidence in both their abilities as teachers and the capability of their students to perform to high standards. This positive approach to diversity in the classroom is exactly what needs to happen in order for education to progress.

*MI Chapters 7, 9, 13, 14*

Chapters 7, 9, 13, and 14 of *Multiple Intelligences* focus on showing teachers how to create a classroom environment that is flexible and accepting to all learning styles. They expresses how important it is for educators to have extensive knowledge of the eight different intelligences and to make their students aware of them too. The best way to do this is to incorporate knowledge of different learning styles into the curriculum. Teachers need to be aware of how many different learning styles their lessons can accommodate, and make changes to their methods where necessary. Embracing multiple intelligences in the classroom is all about adaptability, and teachers need to be open to things like activity centers and student choice as ways to encourage learning. The topic of MI schools was also addressed, with the goal being total immersion in multiple intelligence-supporting curriculum and methods. Schools with this very targeted approach place a lot of emphasis on students being able to experience each of the different intelligences every day, and that they have the right as students to do so. The book also addresses practical applications of MI theory, such as with career choice and technology usage. The element of universality in multiple intelligence learning is also discussed, with the point being that everyone has different strengths and skills that are an asset to life outside of the classroom.

Chapter 14 talks about Howard Gardner’s proposed ninth intelligence and raises questions about how to adapt potentially controversial material into content that is acceptable for everyone.

Learning about the different ways to apply multiple intelligence theory in the classroom is very useful to me as a future teacher. The thought of finding ways to incorporate each of the eight intelligences into my curriculum is a very daunting task, and there is a lot of pressure because messing up results in wasting precious time to educate a student. But the tenets of multiple intelligence theory – flexibility, adaptability, hands-on learning – are all traits that teachers should strive for anyway. As a teacher I will try to be all of these things, because accommodating for different learning styles is of the utmost importance. Something the author said in Chapter 9 really stood out to me; on page 129, the author says that we have to be careful not to create an education system where we exploit students’ strongest intelligences to pigeonhole them into the sector of society that we see fit. Multiple intelligence theory is all about equality and acceptance, and creating a ranking system of different intelligences is not something that would accomplish these goals. As a teacher I want to strive to have a classroom where there is no longer a boundary between the “smart” kids and the “dumb” kids. Teachers need to learn to appreciate the different strengths of their students, and so do the students themselves. The best way for this to happen is for teachers to integrate acceptance of multiple intelligences into their curriculum, and that is something that I am determined to do as an educator.

*UbD Chapter 8 and MI Chapters 8, 11, 12*

Chapters 8, 11, and 12 of *Multiple Intelligences* and Chapter 8 of *Understanding by Design* focus on taking multiple intelligence theory and differentiated instruction beyond just lesson plans. A lot of emphasis is placed on using the multiple intelligences as forms of new and more effective communication. *UbD* says that grading – report cards, project scoring, other forms of assessment – must be about communicating constructive feedback to students and parents, as opposed to assigning an arbitrary and competitive number to a student’s work. Grading must be specific, evidence-based, and focus on positive reinforcement. Emphasis is also placed on grades reflecting students’ work habits and progress towards achievement, which connects to what multiple intelligence theory has to say about assessment measuring all different kinds of success. MI theory can also extend to classroom management as well, which connects back to ideas about communication. The book says that good classroom management is about finding ways to relate to each student’s individual intelligence strengths and understand how to best translate what is going on in their heads to what is happening in the classroom. The use of multiple intelligences can also help teachers better communicate with students with special needs. Armstrong says that an appreciation of different intelligence strengths can be a gateway to more acceptance of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Finally, MI theory can also be used to help teachers better understand the cognitive processes of their students and to encourage deep, introspective thinking that breaks free of traditional educational boundaries and embraces the different intelligences.

Something that I believe very strongly in is teachers no longer viewing their students with disabilities as obstacles to their teacher strategies. We need to learn to be welcoming of the different perspectives and learning styles that all students bring to the table, including and most especially students who have been categorized as having a disability. Embracing multiple intelligence theory goes hand-in-hand with accepting the diversity that students with disabilities bring into the classroom, and I think that kind of interchangeability is a huge step in the right direction for education. The books had a lot to say about how to incorporate multiple intelligence acceptance in grading, which is something that I will need to think a lot about when I am teaching. It makes a lot of sense that we should be assessing students with the same differentiated methods that we use to teach them, but I understand why that is hard for teachers to do. Assessments have always been logical and numerical, and those traditional methods can be comforting to teachers when they are in the midst of working experimental methods into their curriculum. And as far as grading goes, a lot of that is left up to the discretion of people higher up the teaching hierarchy, so teachers may feel helpless to affect change to go along with their differentiated instruction. All of these challenges just mean that I will have to work even harder as a teacher, and I will try really hard to find ways to embrace the different multiple intelligences in all aspects of my classroom.

*FIAE Chapters 7-10*

Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 of *Fair Isn’t Always Equa*l talked about the ways that we need to change our grading tactics in order to match up with differentiated instruction. The key point was that all grades in their various forms need to be measurements of mastery, and the ways that teachers grade currently are not often accurate representations of this. Grades also need to provide teachers with specific, informative feedback about how much content their students are learning. The book says that things like effort, homework, and participation are factored into finals grades in ways that do not benefit students. There is a fine line between rewarding students for trying hard and allowing them to have a good grade without knowing the material well enough. The author says that all three should be considered as steps in the process of mastery, and that we should not penalize students for the time it takes them to master the content because the learning process is just as important as the material. The job of a teacher is to guide students through these steps, not punish them if they don’t understand everything right away. The book says a lot about grading homework, and how this impedes the learning process because low grades do more to discourage students than empower them, and a grade earned at the point when a student has not had adequate time to master the material should not be factored into their overall score. The same goes with giving students the opportunity to redo work for full credit. If the student doesn’t fully master the material on their first try, it does them a disservice to not let them have another chance to learn it and prove that they know it.

I went to schools that always took a very traditional approach to grading, so that’s all I know. A lot of the things these chapters had to say about grades seemed foreign to me, and because I enjoyed my school experiences so much, it’s tempting to say that the author might be stretching things a little bit. But the more I think about it, the more I see that grading has to be differentiated just like instruction does. Grades are a huge factor in students’ lives. They have the ability to cause so much anxiety and stress, as well as low self-esteem or an overdeveloped sense of self. Grades determined what college a student will attend and even if they will graduate or not. Because of these things, grades are not to be taken lightly. Even though it would be easier for me to stick with what I have always known when I am a teacher, I’m going to try really hard to think about what is best for the students instead of what is easiest for me as the teacher. I think teachers need to stop thinking about grades as the end portion of a lesson and instead see them as another stepping stone, as a way to modify and personalize their teaching in a way that best suits their students.

*FIAE Ch. 11, 12, 13, 14*

Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14 of *Fair Isn’t Always Equal*discuss how teachers need to take differentiated grading further than just assessment on an individual assignment, and instead extend it all the way to report cards and course grades. There are many complicated issues at stake when it comes to grading, and keeping with the themes addressed thus far, the chapters aimed to instruct teachers on how to make sure that all grades are indicators of content mastery. When it comes to matters of assigning zeros for missing work, grading gifted and special education students, and weighting grades for example, it is most important that grades give accurate representation of a student’s individual progress and find ways to exclude extraneous factors that can negatively skew a grade. To this affect, Wormeli suggests using the less-common 4.0 scale because it gives more room for personalization of a student’s specific content achievement. He also contends that grade books should be heavily revised, replacing what he sees as arbitrary A’s, B’s, and C’s with indicators of whether a student has reached particular benchmarks and standards. This can be done by listing grades according to topics of understanding and goals that a teacher wants their students to accomplish during a particular unit. Because it can be difficult to make both students and parents aware of important information about what goes into tabulating this kind of adjusting grading, Wormeli suggests including extra comments and asterisks on a traditional report card and finding ways to incorporate a grade for individual student progress throughout the course of the year.

A lot of what we have read about this semester is very different from the kind of education I was raised on, and that made it difficult for me to see the practical applications of all of it and made me skeptical of how effective it could really be. But now that I’ve been in the field, I can see how everything becomes real when it is applied to a high school classroom. Meeting standards and personal progress really do matter more than A’s and B’s, and those letters and numbers do very little to give accurate feedback on how are students learning. When I become a teacher, I want to be one who is able to really help them learn things, and a big part of that is giving accurate grades that can move the learning process forward instead of stunt it, which is what happens when students put in hard work but are rewarding with only mediocre grades. The current grading system really is convoluted and inaccurate, and it is up to modern teachers to change it for the better. As a teacher, I will try my best to put into place systems that reward adequate content mastery and put emphasis on understanding tangible, practical concepts. Improving the way grades are reported also helps get parents more involved in education by giving them access to feedback that they can understand, and parental participation does wonders for a child’s achievement.